Mill's *Considerations*

Chapters II and III

What makes for good government?

- Consistent with his utilitarianism, Mill contends that a good government is one that promotes the "**aggregate interests** of society," the "**well-being**" of the governed (218, 227).
- More specifically, Mill speaks of "a ***twofold*** *division* of the merit which any set of political institutions can possess":
  1. "It consists partly of the degree in which they promote the ***general mental advancement of the community***, including under that phrase *advancement in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency* **[higher faculties→*qual. hed.*]**; &
  2. partly of the degree of perfection with which they *organize* the moral, intellectual, and active worth ***already existing***, so as to operate with the greatest effect on public affairs." (229)
- In short, government is to be judged "by what it ***makes*** of the citizens, and what it ***does*** with them" (229; **cf. tools**).
- Mill gives **strong** priority to first (even when it *detracts* from second: e.g., local democracy [last lecture]): "most important excellence"; citizens' "good qualities supply the ***moving force*** which works the [state] ***machinery***." (226-7; **cf. end of OL***)

A Tripartite Case for Democracy

- Mill argues that popular control of government:
  1. **protects individual and minority rights** (243, 245-7; cf. 292-301),
  2. **enlists all personal energies in promoting general prosperity and good governance** (245, 247-8; cf. 286-92), and
  3. **enhances national character** (239-43 [neg.]; 244, 248-56 [pos.]).
- He connects the first two arguments to his *second* division of government merit and the last argument to his *first* division.
- He says little about the first two arguments, and what he does say about them isn't particularly interesting. His chief interest is in the **third** argument, which is tightly linked to his arguments in OL: **just as OL reveals how *liberalism* promotes the greatest degree of individual development, so C indicates how *democracy* does so**.
- Here the **unity** of Mill's moral and political writings becomes much clearer—***all** are motivated by his **perfectionism***. (Ditto his *socialism & feminism*.) Like Mill, I'll focus on **3rd** argument.

Enhancing National Character

- The **first** stage of his argument is ***negative***, i.e., it focuses on how **absence** of popular control **degrades** character (239-43).
- Mill says of the idealized *good despot* that he is "one man of superhuman mental activity managing the entire affairs of a ***mentally passive people***. Their passivity is implied in the very idea of absolute power" (239). *Why?↓*
- Though he says a few may study public affairs under a despot, he also states "*the only sufficient incitement to mental exertion, in any but a few minds in a generation, is* ***the prospect of some practical use to be made of its results****"* (239).
- The **second** stage of his argument is ***positive***, i.e., it focuses on how **popular control enhances character** (244, 248-56).
  It comes in several parts, *each linked to the one following:*
  1. Popular control is *consistent with* the **active** character type, which "struggles against evils…[and] endeavors to make circumstances bend to itself," ***ultimately*** leading to intellectual, practical, and moral excellence (248-). **{Read 252 passage on U.S./Britain!}**

Enhancing National Character, cont.

2. Formal political *equality* serves as a **goad to political effort**: "the maximum of the invigorating effect of freedom upon the character is only obtained when the person acted on either is, ***or is looking forward to becoming,*** a citizen as fully privileged as any other" (253-4; *also see C-8 on plural voting/graduated suffrage*).
3. Political activity *enlarges the sphere of personal concerns* by providing a **political education**, thereby *extending knowledge* and *introducing variety in ideas:* it makes citizens "very different beings, in range of ideas and development of faculties, from those who have done nothing in their lives but drive a quill, or sell goods over a counter" (254-5; ditto ***associational*** *market socialism*).
4. Political activity improves us *morally* by teaching concern for the **public interest** and the obligations of shared citizenship: through it a man comes to "weigh interests not his own" and be concerned with "the general good," just as a utilitarian should be (255).

- One small problem with Mill's argument is that the virtues he ascribes to popular government, esp. its **educative** function, are most closely linked to ***direct***, **not** representative, democracy, but that's why he backs extensive ***local*** democracy (412-3).

Millian Enlightened Despotism

- In a key paragraph of OL (14-5) and Chapters 2, 4, and 18 of C, Mill offers his controversial defense of ***enlightened* despotism** over "barbarians," i.e., "backwards states of society in which the [human] ***race*** may be considered in its ***nonage***" (14-5).
- Such despotism over barbarians, ***whether it is carried out by domestic or foreign despots (e.g., colonial powers)***, is permissible only if **three** conditions hold, however:
  1. "the *end* must be their improvement" (i.e., **autonomy**),
  2. "the *means* justified by actually effecting that end," and
  3. they must not be improvable by other, less coercive means (e.g., persuasion; *least restrictive means possible*). (14-5)
- Thus, such despotism must be **self-extinguishing**: once they are capable of being improved by "conviction and persuasion," by "free and equal discussion," the Principle of Liberty applies in full (15). ***Enlightened despots are like good parents….***
- Consistent with his ***anti-paternalism***? (Cf. critique of marital despotism and "tyranny" over Mormons [SW; 102-3].) **Yes.**

Millian Enlightened Despotism, cont.

- In Chapters 2, 4, and 18 of C, Mill offers a more detailed ***developmental trajectory*** for "barbarian" societies, *viz.* a step-by-step process of **institutional** reform that induces a parallel process of **character** reform, culminating in ***political and intellectual self-government***.
- The **four** stages of **institutional** → *character* reform are:
  1. **slavery/serfdom** → *obedience & patient industry*,
  2. **peasant proprietorship** → *intelligence, prudence, & self-control*,
  3. **political centralization** → *willingness to resist (local) tyranny*, &
  4. **representative institutions/government** → *spirit of nationality*.
- By the end of this process, an enlightened despot has created not only a set of democratic institutions but also a citizenry that is mature and virtuous enough to administer them.
- **Problems: *capacity*** *(expertise & tenure)* and ***motivation***.
- **Solution?:** *enlightened colonialism by advanced nations*—but does this (***at best***) solve 1st problem, but not 2nd? (*PRQ* 2012)
- *More? See our "Self-Extinguishing Despot," PhilPapers page.*